

Tule River Hydroelectric Complex, Tule River Bridge
(Bridge No. 46-10)
Spanning the North Fork of Middle Fork of Tule River
Springville vicinity
Tulare County
California

HAER No. CA-48A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Spanning the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the Tule River
Springville vicinity, Tulare County, California

Date of Construction: 1913

Present Use: Delivery of materials and generating equipment to the San Joaquin Light and
Power powerhouse

Significance: The Tule River Hydroelectric Complex is associated with events that have
made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local history: the
development of hydroelectric power which made possible the successful
expansion of irrigated agriculture in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and
in Tulare County, in particular. It is associated with the lives of persons
significant in our past: A. G. Wishon was directly and indirectly associated
with the three power companies involved, through his founding efforts with
Mt. Whitney Power Company and his later retributive efforts against that
company, through his development of San Joaquin Light and Power
Company, and through his attempted use of ties to Tulare County Power
Company against Mt. Whitney Power Company. The plants and their
attendant structures and facilities are all typical of construction methods of
the first decade of the 20th century. The Tule River Hydroelectric Complex
was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places on
January 22, 1982, under Criteria A, B, and C.

Historian: John W. Snyder
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HISTORY

The first years of the 20th century saw a proliferation in the development of electric power companies in California. The development of electric service in this area of the southern San Joaquin Valley in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century was both fostered by, and vital to, agricultural development.

In 1899, Albert Graves Wishon founded the Mt. Whitney Power Company, headquartered in Visalia. The company's plant was located at the junction of the South and Middle Forks of the Kaweah River. When, in 1902, increasing business led Wishon to propose a second hydroelectric plant on the Kaweah River, opposition from company directors forced him out of company management. The same year that saw Wishon forced out of Mt. Whitney Power Company also found him selecting the Tule River site for a new development. Seeking financing in Los Angeles, Wishon was offered the position of manager of the San Joaquin Power Company, the Fresno Water Works, and the Fresno streetcar lines by lumber magnate William G. Kerckhoff and engineer Allan C. Balch. With the position came the contract and financing to construct a hydroelectric plant on the Tule River.

Early work went quite slow. With no bridge to cross the river, and no road on the other side, all materials (lumber, powder, cement, pipe, food, etc.) had to be packed in on horses and mules, after being delivered to Camp 1 (Doyle's Ranch) by wagon from Springville. Clearly, work was to rapidly progress.

As a solution, in 1912, Wishon bridged the river at Camp 1 and extended the road for two-and-one-half miles, completing this extension in the spring of 1913.

NOTE: For more indepth history, see Tule River Hydroelectric Complex, HAER No. CA-48.

DESCRIPTION

Crossing the North Fork of the Tule River, the two-span Tule River Bridge rests on na concrete wall pier and closed--end cantilever abutments, all founded on spread footings. Span 1 is na timber stringer span. Span 2 is a Pratt deck truss of riveted construction, on which timber stringers carry a corrugated metal deck overlaid with asphaltic surfacing. This was replaced in kind in late 1941; the present deck system was installed in 1959. Deck protection, originally provided with simple timber railings, is today afforded by metal beam guardrail applied in 1959. The bridge is 66 feet in length, 14.7 feet in width, and provides on traffic lane. It spans both the granite bedrock channel of the river, and a flume carrying tailwater from the powerhouse. As mentioned earlier, the bridge was built in late 1912 or early 1913 during the speed-up of work on the San Joaquin Light and Power Company project, and it was a pivotal element in facilitating transportation of supplies and equipment to the powerhouse.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The proposed project which would affect the Tule River Hydroelectric Complex is the replacement of the Tule River Bridge (Bridge No. 46-10) across the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the Tule River. This is the bridge built by Albert G. Wishon to facilitate delivery of materials and generating equipment to the San Joaquin Light and Power powerhouse in 1913. Today, the bridge is functionally a one-lane structure, on poor alignment, and is in deteriorating condition.

Bridge reports completed in 1956 and 1958 recommended replacement of the bridge because of increasing maintenance problems. Replacement studies were authorized in 1977, at which time the historic value of the Tule River Hydroelectric Complex was recognized. In addition to Caltrans' identification of need to replace the existing bridge, the U.S. Forest Service has expressed concern with improving the alignment of the highway immediately east of the bridge, specifically improving the two switchback curves which make it extremely difficult to negotiate trucks through this section of road. The project would thus improve this alignment. There is no known controversy or opposition to the project. The Tulare County Historical Society has been fully involved with this project since its inception, and have had representation on the Project Development Team; they are in agreement with the proposed project.

The proposed project would involve construction of a 32-foot wide bridge, approximately 300 feet downstream from the existing bridge, and would widen the switchback curves. The existing bridge would be utilized as a detour during construction, after which it would be removed.

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